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ABSTRACT

The movement for community control of schools allowed for the participation of parents in educational policy with regard to their local schools. This movement was aimed at increasing the participation of inner city parents in the schools. This movement has currently slowed down. In large metropolitan areas, the size of the educational system has made it difficult for meaningful parent participation to occur. Community control has inspired some measure of educational reform, but has failed to achieve its goal of meaningful participation by inner city residents in educational policy. The failure of this movement to achieve its goal is not attributable to a failure to perceive the needs of parents, but rather to the events of our time which have relegated it to the bottom rung of the educational priorities ladder. Although the community control movement has run into difficulties, positive experiences with it in some locations and the increasing percent of the poor in urban areas may lead to a revival of the movement. The concept of community control may be what still is needed to make public education viable in urban areas. (Author/AM)

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WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE COMMUNITY CONTROL MOVEMENT?

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Abstract

Whatever Happened to the Community Control Movement?

Community Control is a concept that allows for the participation of parents in educational policy with regard to their local school. In the large metropolitan areas, the size of the educational system has made it difficult for meaningful parent participation to occur. The community control movement, which received its start in the late Sixties, was aimed at increasing the participation of parents generally, and specifically increasing the participation of inner-city parents.

Positive experience with community control in Alaska and the increasing percent of the poor in urban areas are events that may lead to the revival of the community control movement.

New policies are needed to make education meaningful in urban areas. The concept of community control may be what is needed to make public education viable in urban areas.

Biographical Sketch

Donald L. Osborne is an Assistant Professor of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska. His interest in the area of community control stem from his previous position as co-director of Roosevelt Community which was part of the Model Cities Program in Dayton, Ohio. Roosevelt Community School incorporated the concept of community control in establishing a community education program as part of the educational program of Roosevelt High School. Roosevelt High School is an inner-city school that was one of three target schools for the educational component of the Model Cities Program.

Whatever Happened to the Community Control Movement?

The community control movement which received its start in the late Sixties, has slowed, and may be embarking upon a period of decline. If this movement is allowed to decline, the opportunity for meaningful participation in educational policy for inner-city parents may be lost. Community control has inspired some measure of educational reform, but has failed to achieve its goal of meaningful participation by inner-city residents in educational policy. The failure of this movement to achieve its goal is not attributable to a failure to perceive the needs of parents, but rather to the events of our time which have relegated the concept to the bottom rung of the educational priorities ladder.

Ocean-Hill Brownsville in New York City is regarded as the birthplace of the movement, which received its momentum from the "consciousness raising" movements of the Sixties. There were two central arguments used by those advocating community control. One of the arguments was that education in large cities was too centralized. The educational establishment was viewed as being too bureaucratic and unresponsive to the needs of parents. Secondly, it was felt that the board of education did not adequately reflect the composition of the local communities, and that it was not responsive to the educational needs of the local communities. Studies by the National School Boards Association have indicated that board of education members tended to be white professional males from the higher income brackets. Rather than vest the control of the local school to the board of education, it was argued that control

should be returned to the local communities in the form of community councils.

The overriding rationale for community control was its promise for improving the educational process for children. Through the involvement of inner-city parents, in a meaningful manner, in the policy making and operations of the inner-city school, it was argued that their children would develop a positive orientation towards the school and the educational process. Some of the benefits to the school and the educational process were seen as a lessening of discipline problems and vandalism, and higher academic achievement.

At an early stage the movement began to run into difficulties that were to plague the movement throughout its existance. The ideal of communities controlling the schools that served them was generally accepted, but the mechanics of how control would occur were the subject of on-going debates which as of yet have not been decided. The unresolved questions were those concerning whether parents should be allowed to hire and fire teachers? How much say should parents have over the curriculum? Should parents be viewed as advisors, as part of the educational leadership and decision-making team, or as employers contracting with school authorities to provide an educational program?

In addition to the mechanics of community control, the emerging educational issues of the Seventies have tended to defuse the community control movement. The Seventies have been characterized by the unionization of teachers as a consequence of increasing teacher militancy, desegregation in both the southern and northern regions of the country which has generated controversy over busing as a means of desegregation,

and the financing of schools as educational costs have become burdensome for property owners. These issues have served to divert attention from the need for participation in policy making by parents, and may have served to further complicate the mechanics of parent participation.

Teacher militancy has been directed toward improving the salaries of teachers, and the master contracts negotiated by the teachers unions have begun to reflect the desire for more control over the educational process by teachers. The parents have been generally excluded from the bargaining process[1] where much of the policy determination may take place in the future. Busing as a means of desegregation threatens to end the school community relationship. Although busing has admirable ends, it has been disastrous to the concept of community control. Finally, the issue of financing public education has grown to the point that schools have fewer financial resources and are hard pressed to maintain the existing programs let alone initiate new ones. This financial plight has narrowed the policy-making options for schools leaving very little, in some cases, for parents to involve themselves.

Despite the obstacles the community control movement has faced, the concept of parent participation in educational policy-making has achieved some measure of success. Official participation in school policy-making by parents has increased, but participation has fallen far short of control, as the impact and influence of parents continues

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[1]See Silbiger, Sara, "The Missing Public--Collective Bargaining in Public Employment," Public Personnel Management, September-October, 1975, pp. 290-299.

to be minimal.[2] Decentralization has occurred with some form of community participation in most school systems serving 50,000 or more students.[3] Also, since the beginning of the community control movement, school systems have become more aware of the need for accountability. Efforts have been made to define educational programs and to explain the educational costs to the general public.

Although the community control movement has run into difficulties, positive experiences with community control in Alaska and the changing composition of the urban student population may lead to a revival of the movement. In the Alaskan hinterland, the state of Alaska has begun to use the community control concept to establish school districts. Beginning in July of 1976, an effort was made to allow local boards of education and citizen advisory councils to decide educational policy for their districts. Previously educational policy was determined from the state capital in Anchorage. State officials have been very satisfied with the results of these efforts. School construction and innovative program development has exceeded their expectations.[4] These positive results for community control are made even more impressive by the report of the National Conference of State Legislatures before a House

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[2]Finding of the first phase of a joint Institute for Responsive Education and Optimal Computer Systems, Inc. study of the current status of citizen participation in school affairs. Sponsored by the National Institute of Education's School Capacity for Problem Solving Group.

[3]Ornstein, Allan C. "Administrative/Community Organization of Metropolitan Schools," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 54, June 1973, p. 670.

[4]"Local Control a Success in Alaska's Hinterlands," Education U.S.A., Vol. 20, No. 5, October 3, 1977, p. 36.

sub-committee in September that projected a change in the urban student population. They projected that the future urban populations will be composed of the poor. They called for a change in current urban educational policy to meet the needs of this "new" urban population. These events indicate that the community control concept is a viable concept, and that there may be a need for the concept in urban areas.

Further support for the community control concept can be found in the Education U.S.A. Special Report Linking Schools and the Community. This report argues for more citizen participation and urges administrators to utilize the concept.[5]

Community control is a concept that was initiated in the late Sixties, but ran into the difficulty of determining the community's role in school operations. Recent events have tended to relegate the concept to the bottom rung of the educational priorities ladder, but the concept has survived and may become an important part of urban educational policy in the future.

The accomplishments of the movement have been the decentralization of the urban school bureaucracy and increased awareness of the need for schools to become accountable.

In a time of changing urban policy, the concept of community control should be given consideration as a method for making urban education work. With the increase in poor parents and students in the urban areas, community control is a concept that can involve parents in a meaningful

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[5] See Linking Schools and the Community, Education U.S.A. Special Report, National School Public Relations Association, 1977.

way in educational policy. Through this involvement, community control can make education meaningful and productive for both parents and students.